THE BREACH
WHERE THE CHURCH PARTED WAYS WITH ISRAEL

EQUIPPING ISRAEL to Fight Fires
Dear Friends,

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The Ethiopian Jews lived in isolation for so many centuries that many of their religious observances are different from those of Jews elsewhere, including in Israel. As part of their absorption into the Land, the Jewish Agency wanted to teach them how to observe Passover. The ICEJ sponsored a number of these practice dinners. It was special to witness these precious people experiencing the Israeli Passover Seder, and celebrating their own freedom, for the very first time.

Meanwhile, after sitting on pins and needles waiting to see with whom Prime Minister Netanyahu would form a new government, Israelis were shocked to find he could not pull together a governing coalition. The Knesset voted to dissolve, once again, and called for elections in September. Please continue to pray for the country during this uncertain season.

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With your help we will continue to be there when Israel needs assistance. Thank you for all you do!

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Dr Jürgen Bühler
ICEJ President

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

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will never forget my visit several years ago to Whenchou, China, a city of ten million people, with a group of home church leaders. These pastors represented some one million local believers. What a privilege this was, especially because I was the first person to visit them from Israel. I started explaining why Israel is important and quickly found out this was nothing new to them. After the service I asked the leader: “Who taught you about Israel?” I still remember the puzzled look on his face. “It’s all in the Bible,” he replied. This begs the question: What happened in the church for it to move so far away from this simple truth and become the primary force for anti-Semitism over the past 1,500 years? Hateful preaching of contempt against the Jews, pogroms, forced conversions, inquisitions, and finally, the Holocaust, made Christianity the archenemy of the Jews even more so than Islam.

Paul’s Doctrine on Israel
This is even more startling when the apostle Paul could not have been more clear in his teaching about Israel, to whom “pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God” (Romans 9:4–5).

Paul recognized that while most Jews had failed to accept Yeshua as their Messiah, they nevertheless remain “beloved for the sake of the fathers” (Romans 11:28). Paul saw their rejection of Jesus as a temporary state that the Hebrew prophets foretold (for example, Isaiah 6); yet he also believed eventually the time would come when “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26). He thus admonished gentile believers not to be arrogant against the Jews (Romans 11:18) and to consider their own origins: “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Now, by grace, they have been brought near and share in God’s promises.

Developing Cracks
The answer of why and where the church parted ways with Israel is complex and cannot be fully covered just in this short article. In part we can blame Roman policy for it, but far more importantly we should hold the church itself responsible for the decisions its leaders took in councils and synods in the early centuries after Christ.

Even before the first ecumenical councils, the church had already started drifting away from Israel and its Hebraic, biblical roots. After the first church council, recorded in Acts 15, things started changing. First, the demographics of the church steadily changed. While it started out in Jerusalem as a 100 percent Jewish church, within a century or so gentiles became the majority. Jerusalem remained the spiritual center of the faith, but the Roman wars dramatically changed the church’s connection to Jerusalem and Israel. In AD 70, Titus destroyed the temple, and a few decades later, Hadrian expelled virtually all Jews
from Jerusalem and the Land of Israel. The early church’s unique spiritual connection to the Land and the Jewish people was significantly weakened. A further blow came in AD 136 when Marcus became the first non-Jewish bishop of Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the spiritual center of gravity gradually began to move toward Rome and Constantinople.

Nicea and the Jews
The final blow, however, took place in AD 325 in Nicea—a city whose ruins can still be found in Iznik (northwest Turkey). This became the place of arguably the most impactful council in church history.

The Nicean Council was significant for many reasons. It was the first council to take place when Christians were no longer a persecuted minority. Rather, Constantine had embraced Christianity as the official religion for the entire empire. And it was the emperor, and not the clergy, who convened this council to consolidate the church as a unified force within his realm.

BEGINNING AT NICEA AND CONTINUING AT THE COUNCILS AND SYNODS THAT FOLLOWED, THE LARGELY GENTILE CHURCH BEGAN SEPARATING FROM ITS JEWISH ORIGINS. THIS SHIFT OCCURRED IN THREE MAIN AREAS: FIRST, A CHANGE IN CALENDAR AND RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS; SECOND, A CHANGE IN CHURCH ATTITUDE TOWARD THE JEWS; AND THIRD, STRICT RULES AGAINST CHRISTIANS ENGAGING WITH JEWS.
A Change in Holy Days

Until the Council of Nicea in AD 325, the churches were divided on how to celebrate Easter (Passover), while few treated Sunday as a special day of rest and worship. The church in Rome and other Western regions decided to tie the observance of Easter to the biblical accounts of Christ being resurrected on the first day of the week, while going by the Julian calendar rather than the Hebrew. Any link to the biblical feast of Passover was ignored. The churches of the East, however, maintained the tradition of affixing the Passion week to Passover, which kept them more in line to the Old Testament and the traditions of Jesus and his disciples.

But at Nicea, Constantine demanded a unified Christian calendar for his empire. In a synodal letter to all churches the Council wrote: “We declare good news to you! . . . As of now we do not anymore celebrate Easter according to the tradition of the Jews!”

And the emperor himself wrote to the churches in the East: “It was declared to be particularly unworthy for, the holiest of all festivals (Easter), to follow the custom of the Jews, who had soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded.”

Known for his hostility toward the Jews, Constantine continued: “We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews, . . . [but] to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews, for it is truly shameful for us to hear them boast that without their direction we could not keep this feast.”

“At the same time,” he added, “it is our duty not to have anything in common with the murderers of our Lord.”

His reasoning was twofold: first, since the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus, they must also be wrong in their traditions; and second, most Christians at the time simply did not follow the Jewish calendar. Thus, it was a decision based on a democratic consensus that lacked any theological basis.

Constantine’s radical approach totally ignored the multiple parallels of the last days of Jesus Christ to the biblical Passover feast. Jesus instructed his disciples to prepare a Passover meal (Luke 22:7–8) and declared “with fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). He kept it in many ways like Jews do today: Jesus took the cup after the meal and blessed it (1 Corinthians 11:25); to this day, Jews consider this third cup to be the “cup of messianic redemption.” Then after the “Hallel,” the traditional reading of Psalms 115–118, he went to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30). Paul also declares that Jesus is our Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). But all this was ignored.

In the same manner, a new weekly holiday was established: Sunday. Until then, Sunday was not kept at all, save for some Christians who held a time of prayer and Scripture reading on Sunday mornings before going to work, remembering that the Lord rose on the first day of the week. But Constantine’s aim was to separate the church completely from any Jewish customs. So to keep Christians from observing Shabbat, he invented the new holy day of Sunday. A number of Christians struggled to agree. But the follow-up Synod of Laodicea settled the matter: Christians who still kept the Jewish Sabbath were to be basically excommunicated.

A Change in Attitude

Paul’s love for his people was immense. He offered, if possible, to be accursed from Christ to save some of his Jewish brethren (Romans 9:3). But these later church councils were totally devoid of the apostles’ passionate love for the Jewish people. Anything Jewish was unwelcome, including Jews themselves. Instead of Paul’s gospel being “to the Jews first,” the new attitude was to make it as difficult as possible for Jews to join the church. Only if they “pronounced faith according to Nicean doctrine” could they become members. Jews who kept Shabbat were refused baptism.

At Nicea, the bishops also asked Jewish converts to give up their Jewish names and adopt Christian ones. This completely ignored the fact that the apostles all had Jewish names and that Mary called Jesus by the name Yeshua, Hebrew for “savior,” rather than the Greek parallel of Iseos. And his mother was not really “Mary” but the Jewish name Miriyam.

For the New Testament apostles, the world consisted of “the household of Israel” and of gentiles. Only by the grace of God could gentiles be grafted into the natural olive tree of God’s covenant people Israel. Paul considered his Jewish ancestry a privilege (Romans 3:1; Galatians 2:15)—though not a privilege that would save him. But for the Nicean church, this biblical worldview was reversed. Paul’s question, “What advantage has the Jew?” was no longer answered “much in every way” but the opposite, only with vicious hatred. Instead of Jews being “beloved for the sake of the fathers” (Romans 11:28), they were now the “murderers of Christ.” In various council records, the list of the damned included “heretics, heathens, and Jews.” In the eyes of the gentile church, they were all the same. In Paul’s world,
it was gentiles who were without God and without hope (Ephesians 2:12), but now this applied to the Jewish people—a doctrine that ran contrary to all the New Testament taught.

**Rules of Engagement**

All this led to strict laws, which forbade any positive engagement with Jews. Nicea and subsequent church councils taught that Christians should have nothing to do with Jews. Leaders who visited and prayed in synagogues were to be removed from office, and ordinary Christians who did so should be “put off.” The synod of Laodicea forbade any participation in their feasts, and Christians were not to take their unleavened bread during Passover. A Jewish physician could not treat a Christian’s illness, one synod ruled. Celebrating Jewish feasts and keeping Shabbat, according to the bishops, was like “mocking Christ.”

**Nicea’s Impact on Church History**

All these new approaches not only created a rift between the church and the Jews but it also set the church on a path that eventually led to the atrocities of the Crusades, where the killing of Jews was considered pleasing to God. It later paved the way to the Inquisition and eventually the Holocaust, when Hitler could quote the German reformer Luther to justify his hatred of the Jews.

What was even more tragic about Nicea is that it was only the second universal council of the church. Whereas in Acts 15, the Jewish church went beyond their traditions and feelings to welcome and embrace gentile believers, the gentle church at Nicea shamelessly rejected the Jews from all church life and generated hatred toward them for generations to come. Only a few Christian movements—such as the Waldense revivalists in Italy and the Puritans in England—ever dared to challenge this hostile attitude toward the Jews.

**A Modern-Day Miracle**

With the rebirth of the nation of Israel and the emergence of a new stream of Christianity known as Evangelicalism, we have finally started to witness a sea-change in church-Israel relations. While the historic churches are still struggling with their anti-Semitic attitudes, much has changed due to the ever-expanding Evangelical movement since the second half of the past century.

The rift between Jews and Christians seems to be healing perhaps faster than many expected. After such a horrible history between us, it is nothing short of a miracle to hear Israel’s prime minister refer to Evangelical Christians as “Israel’s best friends.” Many Jewish organizations today have a “Christian friends” department, including the previously unthinkable Christian Friends of Yad Vashem, a revered institution that commemorates the darkest chapter of Jewish-Christian relations: the Holocaust. This required moving beyond many historic obstacles and deep emotional wounds, but even Yad Vashem has opened its doors to Christians.

On the Christian side, much has changed as well. Many Christians today participate in a Passover Seder meal, visit their local synagogue, or even help rebuild historic synagogues. Christians from around the world support countless projects not only in Israel but also in many Jewish communities in their own countries. Most amazing to me is the fact that Chinese Christians today adopt biblical, Jewish names. Remember that Nicea called for converted Jews to adopt Christian names, yet now the opposite is happening. And every year thousands of Christians visit Messianic fellowships in Israel to experience and learn from their ancient biblical traditions.

It is indeed a new prophetic season for both Israel and the church. At the ICEJ, we are privileged and blessed to be part of healing the historic rift between us and paving the way for reconciliation in these last days. We live in truly exciting times.

This year’s Feast of Tabernacles theme is “Beginnings.” Many speakers will give a fresh perspective on how God is taking the church back to its beginnings—in a Jewish Jerusalem. Join us in the rebuilt city of Jerusalem to find out how we can all take a role in the divine restoration of Israel, even as the church reconnects with its roots in Israel.

Finally, please prayerfully consider what you can contribute toward our efforts to heal the rift between Israel and Christianity, which has been such a stain on the church for so long. This is your opportunity to make a difference in church history!

Source materials on the Nicea Council available upon request at media@icej.org
LOVING FAMILIES FOR ISRAEL’S AT-RISK CHILDREN

BY JULAINA STARK

“A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity.” (Psalm 68:5-6)

The Father-heart of God and His emphasis on family is clearly displayed throughout Scripture. It is the Lord Himself who sets people in families. So what a tragedy when anyone, much less a child, winds up “fatherless.”

Although Israeli society places a high priority on families and children, there are still approximately 167,000 at-risk youth in Israel today. Over 10,000 children have been removed from their homes by social services, and only one in four are currently in foster care. Although 120 children on average are adopted each year, the standard waiting period for adoption is five years. That is a long waiting period for a developing child to spend outside a secure family structure.

Since every child deserves a permanent home, ICEJ AID is becoming more involved in adoption and foster care programs in Israel. One example is the adoption adventure of Colin and Helen. An ICEJ team recently visited their home to hear their amazing story firsthand.

When Colin and Helen made Aliyah from the United Kingdom to Israel in 2009, they fully intended to start a family. But soon after settling into their new home, the couple was faced with the heartbreaking reality that they could not conceive children on their own. Unwilling to give up on the dream of raising children, they explored adoption.

Adoption in Israel, however, is no easy journey. In addition to the normal bureaucracy, family court hearings, batteries of psychological tests, and home inspections familiar to any adoptive parents, Israel also requires the prospective parents and children to be from the same religious background. Although Colin and Helen are both believers in Yeshua, Israel considers Colin to be Jewish and Helen to be Christian. Although religiously-mixed households are relatively common in Israel, finding a baby with a matching religious heritage is rare.

In faith, however, the family submitted an adoption application, which was rejected—not based on religion but because of Colin’s age. Frustrated by this answer, Helen cried out to the Lord and immediately heard Him say: “I am going to give you a child and it is not going to be difficult.”

When Colin and Helen learned of the desperate need for foster parents in Israel, they contacted an Israeli agency and applied to be a foster family. The social worker assigned to them was candid with the couple, explaining that although Colin’s age would not be a problem for the purposes of fostering, it would prevent the fostering arrangement from ever becoming an adoption. But she promised to do her best to find them a young child who needed their care.
Once their application was submitted, Colin and Helen had one small concern: the next three months would be filled with travel outside of Israel. Colin had speaking engagements in several countries and Helen would be traveling with him. The agent assured them the approval process would take at least that long and they could travel without worry. Happy and trusting the Lord would answer their prayers, the couple proceeded with their travel plans.

Imagine their surprise when, the day before departure, the social worker called. A baby boy, born the day before, was in need of an immediate home. Since the child had one Jewish parent and one Christian Arab parent, the agency saw Colin and Helen as an ideal match. Shocked at this development, the couple considered canceling their travel plans. However, with so many people relying on them, they prayed and told the agency they felt they needed to honor their commitments abroad.

Resting in the Father’s Promise
The baby boy who was a perfect match for their family was sitting at the hospital waiting to be loved. Once again, Colin and Helen put their trust in their heavenly Father; His timing was perfect, and He was in control of their future as parents. In that moment, His promise to “give them a child and it will be easy” became their foundation, and peace rolled in like a flood. So they began their three-month speaking tour, resting in the Lord’s assurance that He would provide.

And provide He did. Upon their return to Israel three months later, the couple were astonished to discover that their social worker, convinced this baby was “meant for them,” had placed the baby in a temporary three-month situation, and he was now ready to come home with them. In the joyful months that followed, the Lord began to open doors that Colin and Helen encountered the first time. The state of Israel considered Colin and Helen individually about growing their family. By the time the social worker came to their home, armed with her list of “reasons why” they should consider this, their hearts were already prepared, and the “yes” came naturally.

Three Become Four, and Impact Many
The story of “Lisa’s” journey to join this little family contained some of the same obstacles Colin and Helen encountered the first time. The state once again had a problem with the seeming incompatibility of religions, but the Lord made a way and the court decided not to separate the siblings. Lisa joined her brother and new parents, and both children were officially adopted into Colin and Helen’s family.

Colin and Helen’s adoption saga has had a powerful impact on their local congregation, which is comprised of Jewish and Arab believers. Joshua was the first baby of both Jewish and Arab descent in the fellowship and seemed to tangibly symbolize their “one new man” identity. In addition to fulfilling Colin and Helen’s dreams of becoming parents and placing two unwanted children into a loving home, the Lord is using their story to reconcile and strengthen an entire community.

While Joshua and Lisa are now part of a happy family, many more children are still languishing in Israel’s social system, desperately in need of a loving home. Join us in making sure they are placed with suitable families here in Israel! Your gift to ICEJ AID will help expand adoption in Israel and provide much-needed support for foster and adoptive parents, once accepted. Give to ICEJ AID today at: icejusa.org/aid

The ICEJ was thrilled to take part in the 2019 OurCrowd Summit in Jerusalem for the second year in a row, our first with a promotional booth. OurCrowd founder Jon Medved launched the summit to showcase the latest advances in Israel’s hi-tech industry and to encourage direct foreign investment in Israeli start-ups.

Medved urges his investors to give 10% of their exit profit to a charity of their choosing. The ICEJ qualified as one of these charities and, as such, we were able to share some of the life-changing work we are doing around the country.

The ICEJ staff serving at our booth made numerous new connections among the over 18,000 business people from all over the world attending the summit. We were blessed to be the only Christian charitable organization represented at the summit. The ICEJ team shared the heart and vision of our ministry and watched as people from every sphere of business were impacted upon hearing about our biblical mandate in Israel and worldwide. We look forward to seeing what develops from these new connections in 2019 and beyond!
EQUIPPING ISRAELIS TO FIGHT FIRES

By Kayla Muchnik

Imagine seeing incendiary balloons and kites soaring through the sky, then watching one drop and set your field on fire, burning your crops within minutes. These are the kinds of daily attacks that Israelis living near the Gaza border have faced this past year.

These arson attacks are not as frequent during the winter months, as it is the rainy season when fields are relatively wet. Yet, as soon as the summer heat arrives, the fields become dry and arson attacks multiply—and fires spread rapidly. Therefore, there is a great need for better firefighter training in Israel’s south.

With this in mind, ICEJ Australia recently funded a Christian firefighting expert to come to Israel to share his expertise and training with his local counterparts. In March, Tim Wainwright, a professional firefighter from Australia with 25 years of experience, visited the Negev and trained firefighters, security officers, community leaders, and youth in fire safety.

Even though this was Tim’s first time in Israel, he skipped touring the biblical sites and diligently poured out his knowledge and expertise to the security personnel and other residents in the farming villages near Gaza. In the youth village of Kfar Silver, for instance, local students learned how to protect themselves and others in case of a runaway brush fire.

All the students who received training from Tim were thankful that he came all the way from “Down Under” to teach them, not only in the classroom but also via hands-on training with fire safety equipment.

“Our class listened to an exhilarating lecture from an actual firefighter from Australia,” said Kate, a local Israeli girl. “We learned about fire, safety equipment, and different methods to extinguish fires. Living near the Gaza Strip, this information might unfortunately become very useful. . . . It was really fun and interesting as well.”

Tim’s visit will surely have a great and lasting impact. One young man at the youth village said he enjoyed learning about firefighting so much that he now has a dream to become a firefighter to help his people! So while becoming better prepared for arson attacks likely to come this summer, small seeds were planted in Israelis’ hearts.

Your support can make a difference in the lives of Israelis. Send your best gift to ICEJ AID today for our “Israel in Crisis” fund. Go to: www.icejusa.org/crisis

MENTORING IN ISRAELI SOCIAL BUSINESSES

By Nicole Yoder, ICEJ AID Director

It was a pristine spring day in Israel’s south as ICEJ AID staff hosted German and Swiss Christians who came to see how their giving is impacting those in need, and to learn about everyday life in Israel directly from the people.

Our tour included a visit to Pinat HaOchel (“Kitchen Nook”), a popular sandwich shop on a side street in one of Beersheva’s more disadvantaged areas. Our host was Chai, the young proprietor. He described himself as a former at-risk youth who had the benefit of learning the trade at Café Ringelblum just up the street. It was exactly what he needed at the time—to be mentored on the job. Café Ringelblum was established as a social business to help at-risk youths learn responsibility, employment expectations, and other life skills.

A “social business” focuses on two bottom lines. One is to make a profit to keep the business viable. The other is to benefit the community in some way. Chai’s life was changed through the things he learned at the mentoring café, and today he passes forward the good he received by helping other youth. One day, Chai hopes to have a whole chain of restaurants, and perhaps one of the youths he trains today will become a partner tomorrow. One thing he knows for sure: he wants his sandwich shop to make his neighborhood a better place.

ICEJ AID is excited to sponsor mentoring programs for social businesses that are just starting out, when our support is needed most. These businesses not only provide employment in the periphery of the country, but they also strengthen and contribute to the communities where they live and work.

If you are in Beersheva, visit Pinat HaOchel and taste one of Chai’s delectable sandwiches for yourself. You will not only enjoy an affordable meal, but also have the satisfaction of knowing that, as a customer, you are helping one former at-risk youth realize his dream while helping others begin to dream as well.

You also can help Israeli social businesses today thru ICEJ AID! Visit us at: icejusa.org/aid
ICEJ AID
Reaching out to all of Israel!

“The righteous considers the cause of the poor…”
- Proverbs 29:7a

OUR AID PROJECTS
As you can see from this issue of Word From Jerusalem, the ICEJ AID program is reaching out to all sectors of Israeli society in a variety of impactful ways. Here is a sampling of our AID projects.

Adoption Program
There are approximately 367,000 at-risk youth in Israel today, and over 10,000 children have been removed from their homes. Since every child deserves a loving home, ICEJ AID is becoming more involved in adoption and foster care programs in Israel.

Druze School Project
Over the past decade, ICEJ has sponsored several youth-oriented educational projects in the Druze community, including a school library, a music room, and an award-winning high school robotics team. In February, ICEJ visited a new AID project in the Upper Galilee in which we sponsored a new computer room in a mixed high school for Christian, Druze, and Muslim students.

Social Businesses
A “social business” focuses on two bottom lines: to make a profit to keep the business viable and to benefit their community in some way. ICEJ AID is supporting several social businesses in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Israel.

Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors
Approximately one third of Israel’s estimated 180,000 Holocaust Survivors are impoverished, struggling with illness, or living alone. Our latest update on our Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors highlights the warm and trusting relationship that has developed between the Home’s staff, residents, volunteers, and the Christian Embassy, which is especially important as many of the Survivors reach old age.

Firefighter Training
With the constant threat of incendiary balloons from Gaza, Israel’s border communities are in dire need of fire safety assistance. Through our Australian branch, the ICEJ recently sponsored a visit by a veteran Aussie firefighter who shared his 25 years of experience with community leaders and youth in the Negev.

Give today to ICEJ AID at www.icejusa.org/aid
Passover

Passover (Pesach in Hebrew), the beautiful spring feast where the people of Israel celebrate their freedom from slavery and redemption from Egypt, always starts with a festive evening meal. During this meal the story of the Exodus is recounted, and old and young alike participate. Quite a few of the Home’s residents were able to celebrate with their families. Others, together with ICEJ volunteers, had a festive meal at the Home. We recounted the beautiful story of God’s redemption for His people from Egypt and the deep significance it has in our own lives.

Esti (center) with two visitors from Lublin, Poland.

Special Encounters

Esti has been a resident of the Haifa Home since almost the beginning. As a young girl she lost both her parents and siblings; only Esti and one older sister survived. After the Holocaust, she and other Jewish children who had been hidden with Christian families in monasteries, in the forest, and other places, were brought to a children’s home in Lublin, Poland.

Great was Esti’s joy when two ladies from Lublin, Poland came to the Home to bring a donation from their church. When these ladies met with Esti there were tears and lots of hugs. They promised to come back again.

This is only one example of the special and meaningful encounters between residents and those who adopt them through our Adopt a Holocaust Survivor Program.
Joy of Music

Every year the Lavrenchuk family from Finland gives Haifa Home residents a taste of “heavenly music.” Igor and Svetlana with their six children, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren bless residents with the beautiful music they make together. Their music is a balm for the soul and inspires and comforts in ways words cannot. Classical pieces and songs in Hebrew and Yiddish helped penetrate the souls of the residents and brought a joy that even made 90-plus-year-old residents rise to their feet to dance.

Our Hearts Cry

On Holocaust Memorial Day, a solemn day when Israel comes together as one to remember the six million who perished during the Holocaust, all places of entertainment are closed. A siren wails at 10:00 in the morning for two minutes and people stand in their place to remember those whose lives were lost in the Holocaust.

At the Home the atmosphere was heavy and sad. At 3:00 the street in front of the Home filled up with residents, their family members, other survivors, young people, soldiers, and others from the neighborhood surrounding the Home. While rabbis, a minister of the Knesset, and MP’s gave their speeches, it started to rain. “Our hearts are heavy, our hearts cry, and even heaven cries …,” says ICEJ Aid Deputy Director, Yudit Setz. She shared words of comfort and words of hope, in the name of all Christians who stand with Israel and show their love by their wonderful support to the Home. Yudit’s words and the daily love and care shown to the residents gives them hope and courage and puts smiles on their faces.

Project Upgrade

We continue to upgrade the Haifa Home and the residents’ apartments. Harry, a Survivor from Romania, and his caretaker lived in a room with a lot of water damage. Their whole apartment needed to be redone, and we installed a new bathroom and shower. Great was the joy when Harry was able to return to his own home that he had really missed! He was greeted by smiling volunteers who had worked hard to make his home nice.

We also had a group from Liverpool come to work on two new units that are being renovated in one of the older buildings.

Support Holocaust Survivors at www.icejusa.org/haifa
YOUR ISRAEL ANSWER:

Taking Israel Out of the Bible
By Susan Michael, ICEJ USA Director

New Christians struggling to study their Bible are often taught to read the Scriptures as though they were written personally to them, even reciting the Scriptures using one’s own name in place of the verse’s subject. While it is important to apply Scripture to one’s own life, it is equally important to not ignore the original context of the Scripture and the original recipient of that particular promise.

For example, a special verse that brings comfort to a person who may be experiencing difficulty is Isaiah 49:16: “See, I have inscribed you [insert name] on the palms of My hands.” This verse lets the believer know that they are known by the Lord, and He holds them before Him, as it were, in the palms of His hands. It is a beautiful verse.

It may be a great surprise to many to learn that the verse is originally intended for Jerusalem—the city that personifies the people of Israel—for verse 17 goes on to say, “Your walls are continually before Me.” So an over personalization of the Scriptures can actually result in a Christian who can recite verses from their Bible but has failed to understand what the book is about.

Getting the “Big Picture”

Another tendency in Bible study is to study by topic or book, which is understandable for such an immense book as the Bible. The danger, however, is walking away from a Bible study understanding everything there is to know about a particular topic, but not knowing the overall story of the Bible itself.

The Bible is the story of God’s love for the world, His plan to redeem that world, and the battle against that plan. The object of God’s love was always the world, and He chose Abraham to birth a nation through which He would carry out His plan to redeem that world. This is the overarching story that the Bible tells, and central to the story is the calling of the nation of Israel.

The Bible is, in fact, a Jewish book—written by, about, and largely for, Jews. Jesus even said that salvation is of the Jews! Christians are partakers of that salvation and are able to apply the Scriptures to their own lives because they are the heirs of Abraham by faith. Through Jesus they are adopted into the family and are part of Abraham’s family tree. But, they do not replace the original family they are grafted into, nor do they annul God’s promises to them.

Rewriting Scripture

Some Christians have tried to claim that the Old Testament should no longer be read literally about the people of Israel; it now only applies spiritually to the church. This is known as Replacement Theology: the church has replaced Israel in the plans and purposes of God. This spiritualization of Scripture is actually a rejection of Scripture by rewriting it to mean something other than its original meaning.

While some Replacement theologians would deny rejecting or rewriting Scripture, others are quite blatant about it. One such group is Sabeel. Founded by Palestinian Anglican Canon Naim Ateek, Sabeel propagates Palestinian Liberation Theology and disregards any portion of Scripture that disagrees with Ateek’s anti-Semitic views. He calls for Scripture to be “de-Zionized” by removing all “Zionist” portions that afford any significance to the nation of Israel and any connection of the Jewish people to the Holy Land.

Anti-Semitic Theology

While that may sound ludicrous to most, Sabeel has the ear of some mainline denominations, resulting in resolutions to divest from companies doing business with Israel as well as anti-Semitic study guides. One such group is Sabeel. Founded by Palestinian Anglican Canon Naim Ateek, Sabeel propagates Palestinian Liberation Theology and disregards any portion of Scripture that disagrees with Ateek’s anti-Semitic views. He calls for Scripture to be “de-Zionized” by removing all “Zionist” portions that afford any significance to the nation of Israel and any connection of the Jewish people to the Holy Land.

This textual manipulation is with a single intent in mind: rid Scripture of the role of the nation of Israel. This contradicts the words of the apostle Paul who, speaking specifically of the Jewish people, said in Romans 11:29, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

The problem is, of course, that if you want to remove Israel from the Bible, you will have little Bible left. Christianity then loses its spiritual roots, churches lose their moral authority, and their membership numbers dwindle. It is an important lesson for all churches.

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